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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/17/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: ENGAGING PHILIPPINES ON GAMBARI'S TRAVEL TO BURMA

REF: A. STATE 144434
[1](#)B. MANILA 3443
[1](#)C. MANILA 3418
[1](#)D. MANILA 3393 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador continues to engage the Philippine government and media on Burma, seeking every opportunity to stress the importance of maintaining momentum toward more concrete actions on democratization on the part of the Burmese junta. Per reftel A, post discussed Burma objectives with senior DFA leadership including Philippine Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Enrique Manalo, who departs Saturday for meetings in Burma. An influential Philippine congressman reports that moves are afoot to draft an inter-parliamentary recommendation, for consideration at ASEAN meetings in November, calling for the suspension of Burma from ASEAN. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador on October 17 spoke with Finance Secretary Margarito Teves prior to the Secretary's travel to Washington for IMF and World Bank meetings. The Ambassador urged Teves to use his contacts with ASEAN colleagues to explore ways in which the ministers could have an impact in pressuring Burma toward greater dialogue with pro-democracy forces. Noting that Teves would be meeting with Under Secretary Reuben Jeffery both bilaterally and along with the ASEAN finance ministers, she encouraged him to take the initiative in pressing to seek ways that the Philippines -- and ASEAN -- could further assist in international efforts on Burma. Teves concurred, and noted that although the lack of Philippines-Burma trade might limit his own country's influence with the Burmese regime, pressure from Singaporean banks could have a significant effect.

[1](#)3. (C) In a private October 18 breakfast meeting with Maria Ressa, head of news and current affairs for ABS-CBN, the Philippines' largest television network, the Ambassador noted the continuing high level of interest in events in Burma among Philippine print and broadcast media, and averred that the current attention focused on Burma afforded a unique opportunity to press the regime for moves toward dialogue and democracy. Ressa agreed, saying that Filipinos have great empathy with the Burmese based on the Philippine martial law experience. She said ratings were high for their TV segments on Burma. Ressa said that ASEAN must undertake a greater role in influencing Burma, or risk damage to its credibility.

[1](#)4. (C) In an October 16 conversation with DCM, the Chairman of the Philippine House of Representatives Committee on Human Rights, Congressman Lorenzo Tanada, stated that he was

pressing for an ASEAN interparliamentary recommendation to suspend Burma from ASEAN, to be considered and acted upon at the ASEAN meetings in November. Tanada outlined that representatives from ASEAN nations had talked recently while attending Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) meetings in Geneva, and he indicated that parliamentarians from ASEAN Chair Singapore were supportive of the concept.

15. (C) Per reftel A, we spoke October 18 with senior Department of Foreign Affairs contacts, underscoring the importance of UN Special Envoy Gambari's arrival in Burma as soon as possible, before the present momentum is lost, and the necessity that Gambari be provided contact with a much broader array of individuals and organizations beyond the government's control, including pro-democracy dissidents, Buddhist clergy, and leaders of ethnic-separatist groups. DFA Asia-Pacific Executive Director Hellen Barber reported that she and Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for Policy Enrique Manalo would be departing soon for Burma, where they will meet early next week in Naypyidaw with Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister U Kyaw Thu, and would press these points. Barber and Manalo will return to Manila October 23 after stopping over in Bangkok, and have promised a full readout of the junta's response to shared Philippine-U.S. views on the crisis.
KENNEY